

The City of Lowell

**Concept Evaluation Focus Groups
Moderator's Report**

November 2002

Prepared for:

**The City of Lowell
Division of Planning and Development**

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Introduction

This summary report is based on four focus group sessions that were conducted on Thursday, November 7, 2002 and Tuesday, November 12, 2002 in Lowell, Massachusetts. A total of 38 Lowell residents aged 25 years and older participated in these discussions. Participants were recruited to represent a cross-section of adults by age, gender, ethnic background and neighborhood of residence. For more detail on the focus group participants, see Appendix B.

The purpose of the focus groups was to explore some of the key findings gleaned from the resident survey conducted in January 2002. Further, our goal was to gain an understanding of these topics in “resident” language. The issues that were explored include: 1) the understanding of what constitutes neighborhood character; 2) the degree of support for a design review process; and 3) Lowell’s ability to meet the needs of residents at various life stages.

As with all qualitative research, care should be taken in using the findings and conclusions reported here. No statistical inferences should be drawn from the results of these discussions.

Key Findings Summary

- Lowell residents tend to think of their neighborhood as their street or the cluster of houses around their home.
- In defining “neighborhood character,” several features of the built environment were cited such as landscaping and cleanliness. However, intertwined in this is also the people aspect of a neighborhood, such as family and respectful or friendly neighbors.
- Things that detract from neighborhood character are also likely to be from the built environment – trash or run-down buildings or streets that are in poor condition. However, some participants also mentioned crimes and gangs as harmful to neighborhood character.
- Lowell residents were shown pictures of neighborhoods and asked to describe each one in terms of its “neighborhood character.”
 - Green spaces, lawns, and trees are positive additions to a neighborhood.
 - A neighborhood that is clean or well maintained also contributes to the neighborhood character. Well-maintained neighborhoods not only contribute to the physical look of the neighborhood, but for several residents, a well-maintained neighborhood conveys a positive feeling about the people that live in that neighborhood.
 - There appears to be differences in the perception of density. While some feel that the houses shown in some of the pictures are too close together, many feel a picture of the townhouses that are attached to each other (and even more dense) have less of a feeling of congestion. This may indicate that there might be ways to adjust the “feeling” of congestion. For example, in the picture of the townhouses, the yards in front may contribute to the feeling of space.
- In general, residents would like to see the City continue to encourage and preserve neighborhood character. However, they vary in how much and what they would be willing to have regulated in Lowell.
 - Overall, residents more strongly support regulating commercial developments and new residential developments such as apartment buildings, condos, and multi-unit developments. For these types of developments, there is more support for regulating large-scale aspects such as the size and context of the building as opposed to small-scale aspects such as landscaping and building materials.

- One concern that was raised often is the financial burden placed on property owners having to abide by these new regulations. To offset these costs, several suggest that the City offer incentives such as tax breaks or discounts on supplies subsidized by the City.
- Lowell residents evaluated Lowell's ability to meet the needs of residents at various life stages. While responses differ for each life stage, there are some common needs among most stages:
 - Lowell has a lack of affordable housing across all life stages.
 - The availability of jobs is also a concern for people of most life stages.
 - Many feel the downtown area is lacking resources for most life stages. Some of the suggestions for improving this area of Lowell include; adding more stores including specialty and department stores, keeping businesses open later in the day, and increasing the parking.
- The city of Lowell is not meeting the needs of families with older children or elderly households as well as those at other life stages.
 - Several feel there are not enough activities available in the City for older children. Some suggestions for improving this situation include more cinemas in the neighborhoods and more after school programs that are fun for older children.
 - The quality of housing available to the elderly needs improvement. Some also feel it is difficult for the elderly to get what they need by walking or taking public transportation. Improvements in the downtown could help in this area.

Conclusions

- In meeting the needs of residents of various life stages, the city of Lowell should focus on three key areas:
 - Providing more affordable housing to residents of all stages of life including young adults, families and the elderly;
 - Providing more positive and fun after-school activities for older children; and
 - Expanding the shopping choices in downtown Lowell to include specialty businesses as well as a department store. This will expand the shopping choices for residents of all life stages and will also create more jobs in Lowell.
- The city of Lowell can improve neighborhood character by developing the City in several areas;
 - Creating more green spaces and reducing the illusion of density by encouraging more landscaping around homes and businesses. This may be achieved by offering tax incentives or by initiating a voluntary program such as an adopt-a-tree program.
 - Keeping the City clean through regular trash pick-ups as well as by keeping roads, sidewalks and parking lots in good condition. Encouraging residents and homeowners to keep their properties clean and in good repair would also be helpful.
 - Increasing the feeling of safety among residents by; adding more police presence in the neighborhoods, offering more positive and fun programs for older children, initiating or encouraging community watch programs, or adding more street lights in neighborhoods in Lowell.
- Based on the results of this study as well as the resident telephone survey conducted in January, 2002, the city of Lowell should be comfortable in creating some design standards and regulations for specific types of development. However, the City should be sensitive to the issue of affordable housing since this issue seems to take a priority over the beautification of the City.
 - While most participants support design review and regulations for most aspects of large-scale commercial developments, the City should focus on the use of the property and the context of the building to the rest of the neighborhood. Regulations on landscaping and building materials, particularly on apartment buildings and condominiums, are not as widely supported by residents.

- Creating design standards and offering incentives and encouragement for small business to follow would also be appropriate.
- At this point, there is much less support for design regulations for single family houses. However, the City could encourage residents to voluntarily participate in programs aimed at beautifying their neighborhoods.

Detailed Findings

Lowell Neighborhoods

To immerse group participants into thinking about the term “neighborhood,” they were initially asked to provide some information about their own neighborhoods. Information on size and detail of their neighborhood was discussed.

They were asked to describe the size of their neighborhood. Although one resident described his neighborhood as encompassing a 3 square mile area, most think of a much smaller area consisting either of a cluster of homes or of a few streets.

“My street.”

“My corner.”

“My immediate neighborhoods.”

“My street I guess is my neighborhood.”

“Belvidere, but I just think of the few streets around me.”

“Maybe 20 homes where you know the people.”

Using a projective technique, participants described their neighborhood. They were asked to choose an animal that best depicts their neighborhood. The animals chosen range from a lion to a church mouse. Several residents describe their neighborhood as a dog. Interestingly, there is no difference in the types of descriptions for both urban and suburban groups. Following are a few examples of the animals chosen and the reasons for choosing them.

Urban neighborhoods:

“A bulldog. The residents go after what they want but make sure everyone is taken care of.”

“A retriever - generous, smart, kind, keep to themselves and don’t growl unless someone is bad.”

“Turtle. People keep in their shell and never ask for anything. They solve their problems themselves.”

“A lamb. I know it’s in the City, but its peaceful.”

“Elephant. Everything is always shaking.”

Suburban neighborhoods:

“A calico cat. Everyone kind of keeps to themselves. But a big mix of people. All individual – like patchwork.”

“A roaring lion. Loud music at night. Cars flying up the street.”

“Yellow lab – homey. Easy going. Friendly.”

“Owl. During the day it is always quiet but during the summer and on weekends there is a lot of noise on the street.”

“Cat. A lot of people just do their own thing. Cats are very independent.”

“Dog – cause they bark a lot. Sometimes they look out for you. Especially the old dogs.”

“Deer – peaceful, restful, wholesome.”

Neighborhood Character

What is "Neighborhood Character"?

To help define "neighborhood character," residents were asked to draw a picture depicting their vision of neighborhood character. Many of the pictures include landscaping elements such as trees and flowers and green spaces.

"A big tree - Makes it feel calm and quiet."

"Nature; pond, rocks."

"Houses and grass."

"Green space; people with yards and trees; a little bit of privacy."

Many contain images that depict cleanliness.

"A neat house with a white picket fence – the American dream."

"Everything clean."

"No trash."

"Well cared for houses."

"Nice clean environment."

A few drew people or animals as part of neighborhood character.

"Family."

"Respect each other."

"Considerate neighbors who don't park in your spot."

"Two people. Ladies. One says 'hello how are you...'"

"Cookouts, kids playing together."

"You need animals in the neighborhood –rabbits, cats, dogs -- tame and wild."

Other aspects that contribute to neighborhood character include:

"Street signs."

"Wider streets."

"Fire hydrants."

"Cops in the neighborhood."

"Sidewalks on all the streets."

Residents were also asked to draw examples of what takes away from the character of a neighborhood. Images that depict a neighborhood that is not taken care of emerge most frequently reinforcing the importance of cleanliness to neighborhood character.

"Trash."

“Rundown houses or buildings.”
“Cigarettes thrown on lawns.”
“Broken windows [on buildings].”

Crimes and gangs are aspects of a neighborhood that detract from the neighborhood character.

“Speeding cars.”
“Crimes, especially crimes towards people.”
“Drug dealers that are trying to sell to kids that don’t know any better.”
“Gang members.”
“Graffiti.”

Streets and parking lots in disrepair are also depicted as detracting from neighborhood character.

“Pot holes.”
“Street itself – small, cracked; my house is very close to the street.”
“Parking on our street.... They are parked right up beside the door.”

Evaluation of Neighborhoods

Residents were shown a series of pictures of neighborhoods. They evaluated each picture citing examples of aspects that add to the neighborhood character and those that do not.

As in the previous exercise defining “neighborhood character,” residents feel green spaces, lawns, and trees are positive aspects of the neighborhoods. The pictures that have more green space receive a more positive response than those without green spaces.

A neighborhood that is clean or well maintained also contributes to the neighborhood character. Well-maintained neighborhoods not only contribute to the physical look of the neighborhood but for several residents, a well-maintained neighborhood conveys a positive feeling about the people who live in that neighborhood.

“It looks clean and neat. This shows that people care about the place.”
“Looks like people are civic-minded. They all take care of their yards.”
“Keeps making me think that people talk to each other. They care about their neighbors.”

Other positive aspects include:

- Sidewalks

- Diversity of colors in housing
- No telephone wires
- Availability of off-street parking
- Houses set back from the street
- Low congestion
- Good architecture
- Wrought iron fencing

Other negative aspects include:

- Context of buildings (new house not fitting in with the design of the older houses on the street)
- Congestion
- Uniformity in building design
- “Boring” architecture
- Streets and parking areas that are not maintained
- Chain link fences
- Too many cars parked on the side of the road

There are some conflicting ideas on a few aspects of the neighborhoods. Residents have different opinions on street widths, for example. Some feel narrow streets add to the character of a neighborhood and streets that are wide detract from the character. Others feel the opposite is true. However, it is clear that a well-paved street, free of potholes, is desired.

Perceptions on congestion in neighborhoods also vary. While some feel the houses in some of the pictures are too close together, many like the picture of the townhouses that are attached to each other. This may indicate that there might be ways to adjust the “feeling” of congestion. For example, in the picture of the townhouses, the yards in front may contribute to the feeling of space.



Positive Mentions

- Dumpster indicates that there is some work in progress. This detracts temporarily but signals an improvement overall.
- Looks pretty clean.
- Old houses are in good shape.

Negative Mentions

- Dumpster out front.
- New building does not fit with the old architecture of the other buildings.
- Garbage around fence.
- Houses are too close.
- Needs trees, flowers.
- Needs parking.
- Too crowded.
- No front yard.
- No privacy.



Positive Mentions

- Landscaping adds to the overall feel.
- Looks clean and neat. This shows that people care about the place.
- Sidewalk is nice.
- Diversity of colors of buildings.
- There are no telephone wires on this picture.
- Gives you a sense of community.
- Space in front of the units – not so close to the street.

Negative Mentions

- Houses are too close together – not enough privacy.
- The houses all look the same.
- Old houses have more character.



Positive Mentions

- A lot of trees and nice lawns.
- Street is bigger.
- Don't have to worry about parking.
- No sidewalk but one is not needed in this neighborhood.
- Looks quiet.
- Not congested.
- Ideal, cozy, very nice, "I want to live there."

Negative Mentions

- Unaffordable.



Positive Mentions

- Wide street.
- Clean, well maintained.
- Modern.
- Looks safe.
- Looks like people look out for each other on the street.
- Looks like it could be very friendly.
- Large houses.
- Houses set back from the street.

Negative Mentions

- Needs trees.
- Impersonal, sterile, no warmth.
- Probably cheap homes.
- Street too wide.
- Unaffordable.



Positive Mentions

- They have parking.

Negative Mentions

- No character at all.
- No grass, flowers or trees.
- Not safe for children.
- Congested.
- No place for children to play.
- Boring.
- "It is like living in a box."
- No place to enjoy the outdoors - no porches or balconies, no green space or playgrounds for kids.
- Cramped, impersonal.
- "Cracked streets tells me nobody cares."



Positive Mentions

- Nice architecture.
- Nice wrought iron fence.
- Grass.
- Established neighborhood.
- Well taken care of.
- Not so close together.
- Clean.

Negative Mentions

- Chain link fence is not nice.
- Wrought iron fence is dangerous if kids try to climb.
- Don't like the tree.
- Placement of the houses is not consistent – chaotic.



Positive Mentions

- Trees, grass.
- Brick sidewalks.
- Small, one-lane street – cars can't go too fast.
- Parking on one side of street only.
- Historical.
- "It is O.K. if things are congested as long as they are clean and well-kept."
- Colorful.

Negative Mentions

- Very narrow street.
- Too many cars on the street.



Positive Mentions

- Courtyard – tables with umbrellas.
- Water is pretty.
- Landscaping is nice.
- Well kept.
- O.K. for singles.

Negative Mentions

- Very industrial.
- "Looks like a hospital."
- Bad architecture.
- Too close to the water – mosquitoes and not safe if you have children.
- Not good for families.



Positive Mentions

- Looks like busy city life.
- Downtown.
- Good for single people.

Negative Mentions

- Too much going on - chaotic.
- Looks noisy with all the traffic.
- Not good for families

Design Review

In creating, maintaining or improving the neighborhood character, many cities work with design review boards to help the city become a place with more neighborhood character. To better understand Lowell residents' support for a design review process, residents were shown pictures of aspects of a development that could be regulated and asked how much regulation they feel there should be for each. The pictures were shown in pairs aiming to show extremes in design. Residents were asked to evaluate each aspect for different types of development ranging from big commercial development to private residences.

In general, residents would like to see the City continue to encourage and preserve neighborhood character. There is some recognition that one poorly designed or maintained building can bring down a whole neighborhood. Likewise, some feel that increased planning and structure in development may influence others to follow suit. However, residents vary in how much and what they would be willing to have regulated in Lowell.

Overall, there is more support for regulating commercial developments and new residential developments such as apartment buildings, condos, and multi-house developments. Also, there is more support for regulating large-scale aspects of the developments such as the size and context of the building as opposed to small-scale aspects such as landscaping and building materials.

One concern residents have is the financial burden placed on property owners with new regulations. To offset these costs, several suggest that the City should offer incentives such as tax breaks or discounts on supplies subsidized by the City.

Each aspect of development is described in more detail in the following sub-sections.

Landscaping

Two images were shown to participants to demonstrate landscaping.



While many like the picture of the house that is landscaped, most do not want to see regulation regarding landscaping unless it is for big new developments or commercial

developments. Some residents support this type of regulations for apartment buildings as well.

"No city should have a say in this."

"You should be able to plant what you want to plant."

"Not everyone can take care of it or have the time like the elderly."

"You're talking about turning the City into a big condo association. That is the level we are talking about here."

"If this was a huge apartment building then yes, they should regulate. All apartment buildings, businesses and retail. The City should be able to say anything about landscaping."

Another issue with this type of regulation is the cost involved with making this type of improvement.

"They [the City] are not paying your mortgage. Can't tell you what to do unless it is a health issue."

"Many can't afford to maintain or create that environment."

"...Have to think of people's pocketbooks."

Driveways and Parking Lots

Four images were shown to demonstrate driveways and parking lots.



Residents' opinions of the parking areas shown vary. Some like the aesthetics of the trees and the bushes while others feel the parking lot without any green spaces is a

better option. These residents feel the parking area without any trees or bushes is safer or easier to get around. Some residents feel that each option is appropriate in different situations. The parking area with trees and bushes works well for businesses that are open during the day (e.g. dentist office, etc.). However, due to safety issues, it is less appropriate for apartments, universities or other establishments that are open at night.

Some feel there should be modest regulation of parking lots but the degree of regulation varies. Some feel only commercial development should be regulated.

"I think the City should be able to regulate to a degree."

"Needs to be some regulation but can be a middle ground between the top and bottom picture."

"I like the bushes and shrubs. The City should have some sort of authority for this. It makes the City look nicer and could attract more business so it is worth it for Lowell to enforce this."

"They [the City] should be able to say they should keep it clean but not regulate plants."

"If it's a development going in, that's a different story."

"If it is commercial and the business is going to pay for it, yes regulate it."

The costs associated with creating parking lots with green spaces is also a concern. While this is primarily a concern for regulations on private residents, there is also some concern for costs to businesses.

"Costs are passed on to everyone. If it is a medical building, then the costs are passed onto patients."

"Yes, it does improve neighborhood character – but does the City want to help pay for it or give credits on taxes?"

"They [businesses] should have some tax breaks or low interest loans."

"How much will taxes go up?"

There is also some concern over types of plantings used, since some types collect trash.

"Should have some plants, but sometimes they put in the wrong kind of plants that collect trash, etc."

Size and Context of Buildings

Two pictures were shown to demonstrate the concepts of size and context.



Most participants feel that new construction should have some sort of regulation in terms of the size of the structure relative to the surrounding neighborhood.

"If you just let people build, they will build whatever."

"The City, in general, should have control over the look of any new buildings to make sure it is consistent with the other buildings [in the neighborhood]."

"Developers have way too much control. The City needs more control."

A few participants disagree and feel that the City shouldn't regulate at this level.

"You can't enforce it, it's a personal thing."

"I don't think it has to be the same in looks, only if it has other impacts on that neighborhood [like parking]."

Architectural Details

Two pictures were used to demonstrate an example of architectural detail.



There is some concern over the affordability of houses with attractive architectural detail.

"Goes with the market they are trying to capture. First time condo buyers will buy the lesser designed units."

"Have to think of affordability; there is a shortage, but I wouldn't want it next to me."

"I like architectural detail but I also want to be able to buy it."

Again, there is some concern over the regulations for private homes, but there are also many who support some type of regulations for new construction.

"Total control on commercial."

"Should take a look at this for development."

"Not on private homes but on the commercial and apartment buildings – would depend on the building they are putting in."

A few are concerned about one group of people deciding how everything will look in the City.

"Depends on where it is going to be. In some areas – yes. If the houses have a certain look in that neighborhood."

"Those condos could look a lot better; I don't know if you have the right to tell the architect."

Types of Building Materials Used

Two images were shown to participants to demonstrate types of building materials chosen.



Many residents are interested in the City regulating building materials for big or commercial developments. There is some concern over the cost of building buildings in the more expensive materials such as brick.

"City can do it if it is new and big or commercial."

"More 'people control' on residential."

"Can't afford to do a house in brick."

"I am concerned about the impact on price and who can buy it?"

A few feel it is more important to have clean neighborhoods with landscaped areas than to be concerned with building materials.

Signs

Two images were shown to participants to demonstrate possible sign design.



Residents feel that there should be some sort of regulation on signs in Lowell.

“Clean up the signs.”

“Yes. The City should control this. Just take the signs down and paint them. It wouldn’t be too expensive.”

“[There should be] some sort of structure – it makes it look nice. Like the downtown – it looks nice.”

A few residents are not in favor of regulating signs. Some are concerned with the loss of a store’s individuality if signs are regulated.

“It is a sensitive issue when you start telling people what to do with their properties.”

“I can see if the sign was a danger to pedestrians or something....”

“Should be some way to keep store’s character.”

Several are concerned with how small businesses are going to pay for the new requirements and many suggest that the City subsidize this effort.

“There has to be some parameters for people to work within. The City could really help them out - -offer half price signs. Provide volunteers to help out. Provide some incentive.”

*“Give them a tax break. ‘If you make it look like this... I will give you X% on your taxes’ or ‘if you can come up with this much we will provide the extra.’”
“Or contract with a local sign maker to give people a discount if the City sends them a lot of business.”*

Another suggestion is to have the sign sponsor replace old signs.

“If they are going to have Coca Cola sign then maybe Coca Cola should pay for a better sign.”

Lifetime City

Lowell residents were asked what the city of Lowell has to offer residents at various life stages including young adults through to the elderly. Each group was discussed in terms of what their needs are and how well Lowell meets those needs.

While some of the needs and Lowell's ability to meet those needs differ by life stage, there are some universal comments.

- The lack of affordable housing crosses all life stages and seems to be a concern for most residents.
- Likewise, the availability of jobs is also a concern. Some feel Lowell is a "bedroom community" with many commuting to Boston or other areas for well-paying jobs. There are a few residents however, who feel there are jobs in Lowell if residents look for them.
- The downtown area is lacking resources for residents of all life stages. Some suggestions for improving this area of the City include:
 - Attract a department store
 - Create shopping opportunities by adding more specialty stores downtown
 - Keep businesses open later in the evening
 - Improve the parking availability
 - Develop the old, vacant mill buildings. Potential uses of this space include; office space, corporate headquarters for a large company, a shopping center, or a Discovery Place.

According to these residents, there is fewer resources for two groups in particular -- families with older children and the elderly.

- Lowell is lacking activities for the older children. Some suggestions for improving this include more cinemas in the neighborhoods and more after school programs that are fun and positive outlets for older children.
- The quality of housing available to the elderly needs improvement, according to several residents. It is also difficult for many elderly residents to get what they need by walking or taking public transportation. Improvements in the downtown could help in this area.

Young Adults

Many residents feel there is not enough entertainment in Lowell for young adults (college students and young single adults). Many young adults go to surrounding communities to find things to do, sometimes taking the train into Boston. However, there are several activities that do exist for young adults in Lowell including:

- Sailing club – boats
- River walk
- Sports activities
- Tsongas Arena
- Clubs, bars, dancing and evening activities downtown
- Restaurants
- Festivals (Folk Festival)
- Fitness centers

Other advantages in Lowell for residents in this life stage include:

- The train to Boston
- The school resources
- Conveniences, such as fast food restaurants
- Copier center
- Coffee shops

Most feel affordable housing is an issue for this group. One of the reasons young adults live in dorms or share apartments is because the rents are so high in Lowell.

Jobs also seem to be an issue for this group. Several residents believe young adults have to travel outside the City to find decent employment. A few, however, feel that there are enough jobs in Lowell for this group.

“A lot of people travel for their jobs. – Route 128, Boston, Chelmsford, Westford. Not a large variety unless you want to work at McDonalds, Burger King.”

“When Wang left Lowell, it destroyed a job base.”

“If young people look around they can find lots of work.”

Pre-Family Couples

Lowell offers some entertainment options for pre-family couples.

- Movies
- Restaurants
- Shopping malls
- Theater
- Arena

However, there are fewer evening entertainment options for this group as compared with the young adults, since some of the bars downtown cater to college students. A few feel that, at this stage in life, many of these residents are more interested in dinner parties, playing cards at friends' houses, or heading out of town for day trips and weekends away. Because of their interest in these other activities, their needs are not as great for entertainment as for the young adults.

As with young adults, affordable housing is an issue for this group as well. Rents are expensive and that puts a tremendous burden on residents at this stage in life, according to some residents.

Families with Children

The needs of families differ depending on the ages of the children in the household. Overall, there appears to be more options for younger children than for older children in Lowell.

For families with younger children some entertainment resources in Lowell include:

- Chuck E. Cheese
- Roller Kingdom
- Festivals
- Sesame Street – Skating Arena

Some feel families with younger children are more centered on activities in the home such as homework, computers, parks, etc. and therefore need fewer activities offered by the City.

Many feel there is less offered to families with older children and teenagers than those with younger children. Older children need to be driven everywhere for activities according to some residents due to distances between home and activities. Some of the entertainment options available to older children are:

- The cinema
- High school dances

A few feel there is more offered in terms of after school care in Lowell than in surrounding communities but many feel there is not enough fun and safe options for these older children. Several feel that older children need more activities to keep them off the streets for safety reasons – particularly to avoid involvement with gangs, drugs and other criminal behavior.

One group discussed activities that were once available in Lowell and that provided options for these older children.

- Heritage Dance Club – 18 and under dances held weekly
- Lowell Flick – affordable movie theater that many could walk to
- Arcades downtown

Some residents feel there is plenty of shopping for the basic needs of families with children. Stores like Wal-Mart and K-Mart are available, but there is a lack of specialty stores.

There is a shortage of affordable housing for residents in both family life stages. Housing is expensive and some feel there is a shortage of decent apartments for families.

Jobs also seem to be lacking in Lowell for this group. Some resident described Lowell as a bedroom community with residents commuting to other locations such as Boston for good jobs. Some feel this shortage was created when Wang moved out of Lowell.

Adult Households without Children

Adult households without children include single adults, couples who choose not to have children, alternative couples and empty nesters. Residents in this life stage have some of the same resources as the young adults but they differ slightly in their interests. Some feel residents in this group are more likely to travel either to places like Foxwoods or for vacations. Many feel older adults fall into a gap in Lowell since there are not many activities for residents in this life stage.

Elderly

There are some programs and services such as HUD available to for the elderly in Lowell. However, many of the elderly are not aware of these programs. A few residents feel the City should do a better job of making the elderly aware of these programs.

Several residents feel there is a housing deficiency for the elderly in Lowell. One older resident says she would move to elderly housing if there was something better for her to choose from. The current options are “cracker boxes” according to one resident.

Some feel there is a lack of resources in the downtown area. At one time elderly residents could take public transportation downtown and find stores and services to meet their needs. Now they can still take public transportation downtown but there isn't much down there that will meet their needs.

Another issue for the elderly in Lowell is personal safety. According to some residents the elderly often don't feel safe leaving their houses.

Appendix A:
Focus Group Screening Questionnaire and Moderator's Guide

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Concept Evaluation Focus Group
Screening Questionnaire

Hello. I'm _____ of Davidson-Peterson Associates, a local marketing research firm located in Kennebunk, Maine. We're working with the city of Lowell to conduct a brief survey on city life, and we would like to recruit you for a focus group. This is not a sales call and is in no way an attempt to sell you anything. The questions will take about 5 minutes of your time.

First _____ (Date/Time)
Second _____ (Date/Time)
Third _____ (Date/Time)

1. First, are you the male/female head of your household?

Yes ☐ – **CONTINUE**

No ☐ – **ASK TO SPEAK TO THE MALE/FEMALE HEAD OF HOUSEHOLD. IF THE HEAD OF HOUSEHOLD IS NOT AVAILABLE OR THIS IS NOT A GOOD TIME TO TALK, ASK FOR A CONVENIENT TIME TO CALL BACK.**

2. Are you a year round resident of Lowell?

Yes ☐ – **CONTINUE**

No ☐ – **TERMINATE**

3. Which Lowell neighborhood do you live in? **[DO NOT READ LIST, SELECT ONE]**

<i>Neighborhood</i>	
The Acre (grp 1,2)	()
Back Central (grp1,2)	()
Belvidere (grp 3,4)	()
Centralville (grp 3,4)	()
Christian Hill (grp 3,4)	()
Downtown (grp1,2)	()
The Highlands (grp 3,4)	()
Lower Belvidere (grp1,2)	()
Lower Highlands (grp1,2)	()
Middlesex Village (grp 3,4)	()
Pawtucketville (grp 3,4)	()
Riverside (grp1,2)	()
Sacred Heart (grp1,2)	()
South Lowell (grp1,2)	()
Swede Village (grp1,2)	()
Don't know*	()
Other (Please Specify)*	()

* Please hold and contact DPA with information

QUOTA (Q. 3)

Group 1 and 2: should be filled with residents from the following areas: The ACRE, Back Central, Downtown, Lower Belvidere, Lower Highlands, Riverside, Sacred Heart, South Lowell, Swede Village.

Group 3 and 4: should be filled with residents from the following areas: Belvidere, Centralville, Christian Hill, The Highlands, Middlesex Village, Pawtucketville.

4. What type of home do you live in? **[READ LIST]**

Apartment ☐
Condominium ☐
Duplex ☐
Single family home ☐
Other: _____ ☐

5. Do you own or rent?

Own ☐
Rent ☐

6. Which of the following best describes your race or ethnic background? **[READ LIST]**

White or Caucasian ☐
Black, African American ☐
Portuguese ☐
Hispanic, Latino ☐
American Indian ☐
Cambodian ☐
Other Asian ☐
Other (Please Specify) ☐ [Text Box]

QUOTA:

GROUP 1 AND 2: AT LEAST 50% OF GROUP MUST BE OF AN ETHNIC BACKGROUND OTHER THAN WHITE/CAUCASIAN.

7. What is your age? _____

PLEASE RECORD ACTUAL AGE ABOVE AND MARK THE AGE CATEGORY BELOW

18-20 years old ☐ – **TERMINATE**
21-24 years old ☐ - **TERMINATE**
25-34 years old ☐
35-44 years old ☐
45-54 years old ☐
55-65 years old ☐
66-69 years old ☐ - **TERMINATE**
70 or more years old ☐ – **TERMINATE**

NOTE: RECRUIT A MIX OF AGES

8. Do you have any children under the age of 18 currently living in your household?

Yes ☐ - **SKIP TO Q11; RECRUIT FOR GROUPS 1 OR 3**
No ☐

9. Do you have any children 18 years of age or older, who no longer live in your household?

Yes ☐ - **SKIP TO Q11; RECRUIT FOR GROUPS 2 OR 4**
No ☐

10. Do you intend to have children in your home in the near future, say within the next three years?

Yes ☐ - **RECRUIT FOR GROUPS 1 OR 3**
No ☐ - **RECRUIT FOR GROUPS 2 OR 4**

11. Please stop me when I read the category that includes your total household income.

Less than \$30,000 ☐
\$30,000 - \$39,999 ☐
\$40,000 - \$49,999 ☐
\$50,000 - \$74,999 ☐
\$75,000 or more ☐

12. One last question—what do you enjoy most about living in Lowell? **[WRITE RESPONSE IN
DETAIL AND SEE NOTE BELOW]**

**[NOTE TO RECRUITERS: ONLY RECRUIT ARTICULATE RESPONDENTS WHO CAN
SPEAK ENGLISH WELL. RESPONDENTS WHO DO NOT EXPRESS IDEAS CLEARLY
AND THOUGHTFULLY CANNOT BE RECRUITED FOR THIS PROJECT.]**

13. RECORD GENDER: **50% OF EACH GENDER IN EACH GROUP**

Male ☐
Female ☐

Would you be interested in attending and sharing your opinions?

[] Group 1: We would like to invite you to participate in a discussion group with other Lowell citizens like yourself. The discussion will last 2 hours. In appreciation for your time, you will receive **\$50** for your participation. The group will be held on Thursday, November 7th, at 5:30 PM.

[] Group 2: We would like to invite you to participate in a discussion group with other Lowell citizens like yourself. The discussion will last 2 hours. In appreciation for your time, you will receive **\$50** for your participation. The group will be held on Thursday, November 7th, at 7:30 PM.

[] Group 3: We would like to invite you to participate in a discussion group with other Lowell citizens like yourself. The discussion will last 2 hours. In appreciation for your time, you will receive **\$50** for your participation. The group will be held on Tuesday, November 12th, at 5:30 PM.

[] Group 4: We would like to invite you to participate in a discussion group with other Lowell citizens like yourself. The discussion will last 2 hours. In appreciation for your time, you will receive **\$50** for your participation. The group will be held on Tuesday, November 12th, at 7:30 PM.

Address:

*Lowell Regional Transit Authority
Bus Maintenance and Operation Center
100 Hale Street
2nd Floor
*Signs will be posted**

Moderator's Guide: Concept Evaluation Groups

Introduction (5 minutes)

- *Explain process:* Necessity for taping, closed circuit Television
 - *Explain ground rules:* No right or wrong answers, only their honest opinions. Respect each other's opinions. All opinions are important. Although you may be the only person in the group holding a particular opinion, you may represent a significant point of view in the community.
- *Finally, please speak up and speak one-at-a-time. Expect everyone's participation.*

Warm-up (10 minutes)

- I'd like to begin tonight by having each of you tell me a little about yourself:
 - First name, occupation of self/spouse
 - Do you have any children? What are their ages, etc.).
 - How long have you lived in Lowell?
 - What areas of Lowell have you lived in?

Neighborhood Character (40 minutes)

- I would like you to tell me a little about the neighborhood that you currently live in. First, how big is your neighborhood? In your opinion, how many city blocks are there in your neighborhood? How big of an area feels like your neighborhood? Why?
- If your neighborhood were an animal, what type of animal would it be? Why do you say that?

Probe: Is it....

- Wild or tame?
- Friendly or distant?
- Attractive or ugly?
- Clean or dirty?
- Fast or slow?
- Does your animal travel in packs or is it a loner?
- Is it loud or quiet?

- Sometimes people talk about “neighborhood character.” What does that term mean – **neighborhood character**? What comes to mind when you hear this term? (*write on flip chart*)

Probe:

- Is it the people – how? (Neighbors – what are they like? How long they’ve lived there?)
- Is it the physical environment – what? (The way it looks? The buildings? The trees and flowers? The schools? The shopping opportunities? The parks? The sidewalks? The streetlights?)

Exercise #1: What is “neighborhood character” to you?

I’d like you to draw me a picture. Don’t worry about how well you draw – I am more interested in what you draw than how well you draw it.

With the blue or black pen, I’d like you to draw what you think of when you think of “neighborhood character.” What would you see in a neighborhood with “neighborhood character?”

Once you have finished your drawing, please use the red pen to draw things that you feel take away from “neighborhood character.”

Let’s just briefly discuss each of your drawings. What did you draw as neighborhood character? Why those? How do they contribute to the neighborhood character?

What did you draw as things that take away from neighborhood character? Why these?

Exercise #2: Pictures

Now, we are going to look at some photographs of areas that may or may not be in Lowell. As you look at each one, please think about what aspects of that picture add to the neighborhood character of the area. What aspects detract?

What about **picture #1**:

- What things in this picture do you think add to the neighborhood character of this neighborhood? Why do you say that? What else?
- What do you think detracts from the neighborhood character? Why do you say that? What else?

Repeat for all of the pictures.

Design Review (30 minutes)

- In creating, maintaining or improving the neighborhood character, many cities work with design review boards to help the city become a place with more neighborhood character. The review process is different in every city but could include a simple review process for new construction that encourages neighborhood character by suggesting building alternatives, or it could include a review process with strict enforcement of certain building codes.

In thinking about adopting a review process, the city must ask itself three questions – what types of developments/structures should be regulated? What aspects of those developments/structures should be regulated? How much regulation should there be?

- From your own perspective, what should be regulated? (**show board with scale**)

Least aggressive to most aggressive

1. Only big new developments
2. All new development
3. Any physical renovation
4. Maintenance

- What aspects of the developments could be regulated? (**DPD to supply pictures of each**)

1. Landscaping -- Flowers and trees around buildings
2. Driveways and parking lots (size, location, etc.)
3. Size, location, and context of building (how it fits in with the other buildings in the area).
4. Architectural style or design features (certain types of building designs)
5. Types of building materials used (roofing, siding, etc.) and/or color

- How should the design process work? (**show board with scale**)

Least aggressive to most aggressive

1. None
2. Voluntary advisory review – property owner could choose to go before a design review board. The Design review board would offer suggestions but would not require compliance.
3. Required advisory review – property owner would have to go before a design review board. The Design review board would offer suggestions but would not require compliance.
4. Required review board with enforcement of regulations

(Have up a flip chart with a graph. Numbers along the X-axis correspond to the pictures of the aspects of developments that could be regulated. The

pictures with their corresponding #s are spread out on the table. The types of developments that could be regulated should be on the Y-axis– see example below)

Now let's think about the city of Lowell. Let's pretend that we are the planning board for the city of Lowell and we need to recommend to the city whether or not we will have any regulations and, if so, how much regulation we will have for each type of structure.

Let's talk about picture 1. Should the city of Lowell regulate the trees and flowers around big new developments? How much should this be regulated (1 – 5 from regulation list)? **(Record the number that corresponds with the level of regulation for each picture and move up the Y-axis to the next aspect for that picture. Continue exercise for each picture along the X-axis)**

Example:

4. Maintenance	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3. Any physical renovation	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2. All new development	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
1. Big new developments	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Picture #1: landscaping	Picture #2: Driveways & parking lots	Picture #3: Size/location & context of buildings	Picture #4: Architectural design/ features	Picture #5: Types of bldg materials used

- *Let's now take a step back and look at what we have come up with here. **(Summarize results of charting exercise – e.g. It looks like we feel there should be a lot of regulation for large-scale projects and less for single family dwellings. Does this sound about right to you?)***
- If the city created a review and or regulatory process, who should this group be made up of? Who should decide what we can and can't do?

Probe:

- Residents from each neighborhood
- Staff at Department of Planning and Development
- Appointed city board such as the planning board
- Designated review board made up of selected individuals with specific qualifications such as architects or designers, etc.

“Lifetime” City (30 minutes)

We’ve just spent some time talking about neighborhood quality. Now I’d like to leave that topic and focus the conversation on something a little different.

- We are a group of people in different times in our lives and living in different family structures or households. We are younger or older, living with or without children in our household. There are all different kinds of households or life stages in our society. We have come up with a few different kinds that I would like to talk about now. First....
 - Young adults (college students, young singles living together, etc.)
 - Pre-family couples (those who are contemplating families and basically starting lives together)
 - Families with young children (pre-schoolers through elementary school)
 - Families with older children (Jr. High to high school)
 - Adult households without children (single adults, unmarried couples, alternative couples, married couples who do not plan on having children, empty-nesters, etc.)
 - Retirees
 - The elderly

For each:

- What defines this life stage? Who are these people?
- How would you describe the lifestyle of people in this stage of their lives?
- What’s most important to people in this stage of life?
- What are their concerns?
- What do they do for recreation?
- What brings them joy?
- Where are they spending their money?
- Where do they live?
- Does this life stage include different groups whose styles are based upon income? How do these groups differ?

- Now, let's talk about these life stages with respect to Lowell... How well are each of these life stages represented in Lowell? Are any more or less prevalent? Which do we have more of? Which do we have less of?

Go through each household type....

- Do you think Lowell is a good place to live for someone in this life stage? Why or why not?
 - What does Lowell do best for these people? What else?
 - What is Lowell lacking for people in this life stage? (***Specifically probe housing, entertainment, shopping, business/job opportunities, how income may affect this life stage***)
 - What could Lowell do to make it even more enjoyable for people in this life stage to live there?
-
- Are there any groups in Lowell that you can think of that we did not mention?

Closing Comments and Questions from Observers (Time Permitting) (5 minutes)

Appendix B:
Participant Details

Participant Details

	Number of Participants
	Total = 38
Income	
Less than \$30,000	13
\$30,000 - \$39,999	8
\$40,000 - \$49,999	4
\$50,000 - \$75,000	6
More than \$75,000	7
Age	
25-34	9
35-44	13
45-54	6
55-65	10
Children under 18 living in household	
Yes	14
No	24
Gender	
Male	17
Female	21
Living Situation	
<u>Own home</u>	
Single family home	18
Duplex	2
Condo	5
<u>Rent</u>	
Apartment	10
Duplex	1
Single family home	2

Participant Details (Continued)

Number of Participants

Total = 38

Ethnic Background

Caucasian	24
Cambodian	6
Hispanic/Latino	1
Other Asian	5
African American	1
American Indian	1

Neighborhood

The Acre	2
Belvidere	3
Centralville	3
Downtown	4
The Highlands	10
Lower Belvidere	2
Lower Highlands	6
Pawtucketville	3
Sacred Heart	1
South Lowell	4